

## LOVE'S MAGIC

By AGNES G. BROGAN

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JOEL had fallen into a habit of slavish obedience to Diana's every whim since the day that his mother had brought the orphaned baby home to live at Burton House. Diana had never been an object of charity, but the small annuity left her needed careful management in order to make it suffice for all needs.

When Diana was a young schoolgirl it had been an easy matter to contribute an occasional frock or ribbon to her modest wardrobe, but as she grew older her dark eyes were quick to discover and quick to resent these kindly deceptions. She had early evinced a decided talent for the art which had been her father's profession, and her dreams of a future career were as rose colored as his had been when that promising career had ended so briefly—at its very beginning.

"Count it again, Joel," she said, "and see if we cannot economize in some way to pay for painting lessons."

Joel smiled in his patient way and went over the list again. "Can you do with a frock or two less?" he asked.

"No well regulated young person needs more than two dresses in summer," Diana answered promptly—"both white and one always fresh and clean." So she ran back to confer with Joel's crippled mother upon the subject of painting lessons.

Diana made remarkable progress in her art studies, and when school days became a thing of the past the girl started in with a determined purpose, on what she had termed "her life's work."

When Diana's first painting received its finishing stroke it was Joel who proudly took it into the city and who arranged to have it most advantageously exhibited. After what seemed an interminable time of waiting a telegram came for Joel. The painting had been sold—actually sold—and an order left for a second picture. The price paid was very small. "But," said Diana, "what has money to do with a wonderful, beautiful miracle like this?" So Joel hastened to town to settle the bargain, and Diana turned into a sunny being, who laughed and sang and painted many pictures, disposing of each one with unheard of success. Joel gave up his customary trip to Washington that year, to stay and rejoice with her. She came to him one evening as he sat smoking an after dinner cigar.

"I would like to talk to you, Mr. Sphinx," she said. Joel smiled. He was accustomed to Diana's teasing.

"I have been thinking, Joel," the girl continued, "that I waste much time traveling back and forth to the city to attend my art classes and could really accomplish more if my studio were there."

"You don't mean"—he began incredulously.

"Yes, I do," Diana interrupted. "Listen before you object. Old Nurse Lizzie could go along to take care of me,

veranda one afternoon. "Have you seen Diana?" she asked. "I have missed her for some time."

"No," he replied. "I have not seen her." A sudden presentiment paleled beneath its coat of tan. With nervous haste he produced a key ring, though he knew instinctively that the key he sought would not be there. After all these months of watchfulness he had left it carelessly in an open door, and this open door would reveal to the girl he loved the fulfillment of all her bright hopes. Hastily entering the house, he ascended a rear stairway and, reaching the second landing, passed on again to an attic floor. The boards resounded beneath his tread as he crossed to a door which led into a small gable room. Joel hesitated a moment as though to gain courage, then stepped inside. Upon the four walls fastened to receive them hung many paintings in costly frames. They were all here—Diana's pictures—not one missing, from the first crude sketch to her latest triumph, and crouched upon the floor, her slight figure shaken by noiseless sobs, lay the little artist.

"Diana," the man whispered. "She turned upon him fiercely. "So this is what you have been doing all along," she cried, "buying my paintings and hiding them here in your garret, while I have been living upon your money. Why did you let me go on believing in myself—in my art—when I am but a hopeless failure?"

"It has all been a mistake, Diana," Joel said unsteadily—"just another one of my blundering ways of trying to make you happy, and you must know that every picture was given a fair chance before I finally brought it here."

"Oh, I am sure of that!" Diana answered and laughed mockingly. "But you had no right to deceive me. Joel, no right to force upon me money which I did not earn."

"I have spent a great deal of money in my life for things which gave me pleasure," the man answered gently, "while each picture of yours, Diana, has been worth more than twice its price to me."

The girl sighed and motioned toward the pictures. "My career has begun and ended here," she said.

Joel took one step toward her, then paused. "Diana," he said tensely, "marry me and I will help you realize your ambition."

"No, Joel," she said wearily. "you must invent some other plan to help me out of my difficulty."

"A gentleman to see you, sir," called Lizzie from the threshold, and Joel put out his hand to receive a square white card.

"Strange," he muttered. "What business can Harold J. Fox, the millionaire, have with me?"

Diana made no response, and with one backward regretful glance Joel hurried away. When he returned a few moments later his voice was strangely brusque. "Mr. Fox came to see me concerning your painting, 'Love's Magic,' Diana. He wishes to purchase it."

"Joel!" the girl cried reproachfully. "It is quite true," Joel repeated. "I would not deceive you further." Then his face darkened. "No one shall buy the picture," he said passionately. "It is mine."

Diana's eyes widened. Then, half laughing, half crying, she ran toward the door. "Don't you see what this means to me, Joel?" she said breathlessly. "I can paint pictures, I can! Before he could speak she had disappeared down the stairway."

When Joel entered the parlor the young millionaire stood looking down into Diana's glowing face. "I am an ardent art enthusiast," he was saying, "but no conception of the old masters has ever appealed to me as your beautiful picture, Miss Dale. I must have the picture, Miss Dale. You shall name your own price."

Diana turned with pretty dignity to Joel. "Mr. Burton manages my business affairs," she replied.

"I must refer to an authority before putting a price upon the picture," Joel said slowly. "I have not sufficient knowledge to speak on the subject of art. I—I can only feel its beauty."

Mr. Fox looked slightly amused. "The painting, 'Love's Magic,' is not for sale," Diana said suddenly. "If you will give me a trial, Mr. Fox, I will paint another picture, which shall have my best effort, and you may judge of its merit."

So "Love's Magic" joined the array of paintings in the garret room, and ignoring Joel's humble gratitude, Diana returned to her city studio to labor in a fever of joyous inspiration, while to the faithful ones at Burton house came frequent scribbled notes.

"I am earning my living," she wrote to Joel. "It is necessary since a certain generous sphinx is no longer allowed to deceptively provide my income. Mr. Fox, whom you may know, is responsible for the manufacture of various powders and lotions, has offered to me the illustrating of their advertisements in magazines."

As the days passed Joel felt vaguely troubled, for every note bore reference in some way to the young man whom Diana grew to regard as her benefactor.

"Joel," his mother said one day, looking up from a letter she had been reading. "This Mr. Fox has taken his mother and sister to call upon Diana in her studio. Does it not seem strange that this noted art devotee should thus interest himself in our little novice?"

"It would seem strange to me, mother," Joel answered sadly. "If Mr. Fox failed to be interested in Diana."

The golden days of summer drew near an end, and still Diana remained in the city. She was very reticent during her hurried visits to the crippled mother, and a growing fear tugged at Joel's heartstrings. His mother voiced that fear.

"Diana is changed," she said. "Can it be possible, Joel, that she has fallen in love with that man?"

"He is young, rich and handsome," her son answered bitterly. "What more could one desire?"

"Perhaps this letter may enlighten us," his mother suggested. "It is addressed to you."

"For a moment Diana's familiar handwriting danced in a misty blur, then Joel read the brief message. 'I am coming home tomorrow,' it said. 'I have something to tell you which

shall know tomorrow, mother," he said dully. Later he climbed wearily up to the attic room and sat long before the shadowy paintings. When Diana passed out of his life forever he would have no more to dream of the glided frames, as he must put a veil before his memory of her. So as the moon sailed high in the heavens Joel made his great renunciation.

A rustling sound in the doorway attracted his attention. "Joel, I want to see the picture," he called to his feet; no one must enter here. Then he caught his breath sharply. "Diana!" he cried wonderingly.

She stood resting against the panel of the door, her slight figure outlined in the moonlight; a strangely shy Diana who laughed softly in embarrassment and who regarded him timidly from beneath her long lashes.

"I intended coming tomorrow, Joel," she said, "but it seemed foolish to waste a whole night before starting; my train arrived long ago, but I think it has taken me hours to walk from the station. Everything was so beautiful—the bush, the scent of flowers. I traveled down an enchanted lane which led me home at last."

Joel remained silent.

"I stopped in to see the mother," the low voice continued, "then remembering what you had said of moonlight nights, Joel, I hoped to find you lonely, and I hoped to find you here."

Still that strange dumbness seemed to blind him.

Diana laughed tremulously. "Please say that you have been lonely without me, Mr. Sphinx," she said.

Then, with a quick stride, Joel crossed the room and clasped the girl in a masterful embrace. "Diana," he cried, "tell me you do not care for that other fellow."

"He wanted me to care, Joel," she answered demurely, "but I could not. You see, I was foolish enough long ago to give my whole heart to a dear big stupid who has shown his love for me in many ways, though it never occurred to him to speak of it."

And the moon, looking boldly through the gabled windows, rested upon a man's fair head bent low above a little dusky one; then it crept slowly up the wall to shine with startling brightness upon Diana's masterpiece, where the girl of the painting looked with unbounded trust into the triumphant eyes of her lover.

"Look, Diana," the man whispered; "that has ever been my dream picture, even when there seemed no hope of fulfillment. You still were the maid and I was the man, who traveled love's way together."

"Dear," the girl answered, "it has always been just you and I since brush first touched the canvas."

Then hand in hand, like the children of her fancy, the two descended the stair.

"What has happened?" the mother asked eagerly as they appeared before her. "Your faces are fairly illuminated."

And Joel smiled his slow contented smile.

"That, mother," he replied, "is the visible reflection of 'Love's Magic.'"

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